COMMERCIAL BREAKDOWN

The Tories were divided on the issue as well, of course, with leading lights such as Sir Anthony Eden and Rab Butler (despite his experience being nagged down the phone by F.W. Ogilvie) skeptical about breaking up the monopoly. But a newer breed of Conservative was breaking through as well, one who didn't go the usual route of public school followed by *Literae humaniores* and then straight into Parliament, but instead went into business and made money before turning to politics.

Such as John Rodgers, who between Modern History at Oxford and wartime service with the Foreign Office had been a director at J. Walter Thompson, one of (if not the) biggest advertising agencies in Britain, as well as a member of the BBC's General Advisory Council for two three-year terms until 1952. He'd been there when the Beveridge Committee came calling a few years earlier, and had spoken strongly to them in favour of "sponsorship" and the potential breakup of the BBC's monopoly.

Now Rodgers was in Parliament in his own right, as MP for Sevenoaks - one of several new Conservative MPs elected in the reversion-to-type 1950 election. On the 2nd of April 1953, he introduced a formal debate in the Commons on commercial broadcasting, prefacing it by admitting up-front that yes, he had been a director at JWT, but that had nothing to do with why he felt so strongly in its favour. It was simply that the future, as he saw it, lay in private enterprise, and commercial broadcasting was part of that. By dragging their heels on the issue, he argued, the Government was impeding progress.

Opposing him was Christopher Mayhew, Labour's resident broadcasting expert (he practically invented the Party Political Broadcast in 1951, not that it helped them win the election), who simply pointed out pragmatically that commercial television was basically inevitable, it was just that these things took time. Despite passionate opposition from himself and others, particularly in the Labour Party, there were vast swathes of American product on their way to British shores, more or less unstoppably; the choice at this stage was to be swamped by the colonials and their disregard for the Queen's English, or ensure their own properly British equivalents were there to meet them. As things stood, it was just a matter of time, although Mayhew still wished fervently it were not so, and would work to change it.

The final speech of the debate came from another Conservative, David Gammans, who gleefully made the issue party political - despite his own party being divided - saying that he hoped very

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sincerely that, come the next election, Labour made their opposition to commercial television into a major electoral issue.

"*Nothing could be of greater advantage to the Conservative Party. For one thing, it will be plain to the general public that it is the Socialists who propose to prevent their enjoying a variety of programmes."*

In so doing Gammans underlined a simple fact about the coming of commercial television: the line between entertainment and politics was blurring at the edges.

He did, however, have to admit that, while some form of commercial broadcasting was coming, and licences were being drawn up, there wasn't any kind of plan in place as yet for what form it would take, or what those licences would be for, or basically anything at all, really. The one thing that had been decided was that no-one wanted, or cared particularly, about commercial radio. If sponsorship was to arrive in British broadcasting at all, it would be on television. This was the future now, after all.

Apart from that, it was all up for grabs. It was a whole new paradigm, or something; there were a whole raft of questions in need of answers, mostly pertaining to that control issue again. These questions included but were far from limited to: what kind of regulatory body should be set up? What should those regulations be? What kind of broadcasting hours are we talking about? How long of a contract? Should we even restrict those things at all? How much ministerial oversight should there be, and of what nature, and which department even?

And what about the BBC? How involved should they be? They were increasingly determined to launch a second television channel; could this be the opportunity? Or, conversely, could the anti-commercial lobby use it as an excuse to keep sponsorship out? Could it still be prevented altogether? Christopher Mayhew still hoped so, setting up a lobbying group with Violet Bonham Carter in 1953 to "resist the introduction of commercial television into this country and to encourage the healthy development of public service television in the national interest". This issue was going to run and run.

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